



Courthouse Security, Facilities and Staffing



A \$7.27 million renovation has vastly improved security at Calumet County's court facilities. Above, Michelle Jacobs, deputy clerk of traffic court, serves a customer from behind bulletproof glass.

Photo credit: *The Post Crescent*



Construction began on a new courthouse in La Crosse County in 1996. The building meets the standards on security and facilities set forth in the Supreme Court Rule. It houses the courts, district attorney and clerk of circuit court, and will adjoin a new jail. The building was completed in August 1997.

Photo credit: Hon. John J. Perlich

Supreme Court Rule 70.38 and 70.39, effective June 1995, established standards for circuit court security, facilities and staffing in Wisconsin. Since 1996, the Supreme Court's Policy and Planning Committee (PPAC) has collected information from each county to measure the courts' progress in meeting the standards.

The standards set forth in the Supreme Court rule for security, facilities and staffing are intended to be statements of general purpose and procedure adaptable to court facilities of varying size, age and configuration. The Supreme Court adopted the rule with a focus on cooperation. The rule states: "This rule is promulgated by the supreme court to promote communication among circuit courts, county officials, court planners, architects and contractors concerning court facilities issues. It is intended to be a statement of general purpose and procedure which establishes a flexible framework for courts' participation in decision-making regarding court facilities while recognizing the wide range of needs and circumstances which exist in counties across the state."

Security and Facilities Committees

To facilitate cooperative efforts, the rule required each county to establish a security and facilities committee. The committees must report twice a year on progress towards implementing the standards. Each county committee is composed of: one circuit court judge, the county board chair, the county executive, the clerk

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of circuit court, the family court commissioner, the district attorney, the sheriff, a lawyer from the county bar association, a representative of a victim-witness support organization and a representative of the criminal defense bar.

Status Reports

With 97 percent of counties reporting, the following compliance information was gathered in 1996:

- ◆ 79 percent of circuit court branches are equipped with silent security alarms connected to law enforcement.
- ◆ 49 percent of the counties provide metal detection devices to court security officers.
- ◆ 27 percent of the courthouses have a sectoring system that divides the building into three types of areas according to the nature of access to them: public areas, judge and staff areas, and prisoner and law enforcement areas.
- ◆ 3 percent of the counties have at least two trained and sworn court security officers in each courtroom that hears criminal, divorce, harassment, domestic or child abuse cases.

This type of information on the status of Wisconsin's courthouses has not been available previously. It helps to identify strengths and weaknesses in court facilities and provides the Supreme Court with a tool for measuring local cooperation on facilities and staffing issues.

Progress

As a result of the rule, a number of counties have initiated security and/or facility improvements. The following counties reported courthouse security initiatives: Ashland, Bayfield, Brown, Buffalo, Calumet, Chippewa, Clark, Crawford, Dane, Door, Douglas, Fond du Lac, Grant, Jackson, Jefferson, Kewaunee, La Crosse, Lafayette, Manitowoc, Marathon, Marinette, Marquette, Milwaukee, Monroe, Oconto, Ozaukee, Pepin, Pierce, Price, Racine, Rock, Sauk, Shawano, Sheboygan and St. Croix.

Comments submitted as part of the reporting requirement make evident that the rule has increased cooperation and security awareness in the courthouses. The following comments were included in progress reports:

Judge Lawrence F. Waddick, Washington County Circuit Court wrote:

"Probably the most important change occasioned by creation of this committee is the heightened security awareness of not only its members but more significantly, of all the courthouse staff. They are now more attuned to anticipate and recognize potential security problems...."

Judge Dane F. Morey, Buffalo and Pepin County Circuit Courts, wrote:

"The meetings are most helpful in keeping these issues before the county and court system. These meetings also foster cooperation between the branches of government."

Clerk of Circuit Court Clara Minor, Dunn County, wrote that the standards have improved security, "by increasing our awareness, thereby enabling us to increase employee awareness. It also encouraged the county to take a closer look at our current facilities."

Judge Emily S. Mueller, Racine County Circuit Court, wrote:

"The standards on courtroom design have been a great help in providing us with an understanding of the needs of judges, staff and participants in court proceedings. We have used the Supreme Court's standards many times when reviewing courtroom construction plans. The standards have been an excellent guide throughout this planning process."

